DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 201 539 SO 013 124

TITLE	Recovering the Afro-American Historic Heritage of Philadelphia: Oral History Accounts.
INSTITUTION	Philadelphia School District, Pa.
SPONS AGENCY	Boston Safe Deposit and Trust Co., Mass.; Education Development Center, Inc., Newton, Mass.; Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	80
NOTE	60p.; For a related document, see ED 195 451.
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Black History; *Blacks; *Ethnic Studies; Grade 8; Interviews; Junior High Schools; *Neighborhoods; *Oral History; Primary Sources
IDENTIFIERS	Ethnic Heritage Studies Program; *Pennsylvania (Philadelphia)

ABSTRACT

This publication contains the transcripts of the oral history interviews of Afro Americans in Philadelphia. This project involved eighth grade Afro American students at the William L. Sayre Junior High School in exploring the local history of their West Philadelphia community. As a second part of the project, oral histories were collected by eighth graders at the Phillis Wheatley Middle School in Boston, Massachusetts (see ED 195 451). To identify people to be interviewed, the students were involved in visiting historic buildings and landmarks associated with Philadelphia's Afro American history. The places of the field trips are listed. The ten persons interviewed, ranging in age from 44 to 83, included a retired cook, a mailman, a junior high school social studies teacher, a school principal, a mother and grandmother, a chauffeur, a businessman, a barber, a real estate person, and a newspaper reporter. Their recollections and stories can be useful in gaining understanding and feeling of the urban Afro American history and experience in Philadelphia during the 20th century. (Author/RM)

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Recovering the Afro-American Historic Heritage of Philadelphia

ORAL HISTORY ACCOUNTS

SP 013 124

Ethnic Heritage Studies Project
Class 8-14 1979-80

William L. Sayre Junior High School
The School District of Philadelphia
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Sponsor:
Education Development Center, Inc., 55 Chapel Street, Newton, Mass. 02160

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This work was developed under a grant from the U.S. Office of Education, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and a supporting grant from The Peter Strauss Trust at the Boston Safe Deposit and Trust Co., Boston, Mass. However, the content does not necessarily reflect the position or policy of either agency, and no official endorsement should be inferred.

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THE ETHNIC HERITAGE STUDIES PROJECT

. . . How did Afro-American people in a given urban community live many years ago—in the 1800's, the early 1900's and up to 1960?

. . . In what ways does the present community reflect what happened in the past?

. . . Can we think about the future urban communities using insight to and understandings about the past?

. . . How do we provide a sense of community identity for older and younger residents of an urban community?

These four questions were used to guide the approaches and activities engaged in by a class of eighth-grade Afro-American students and their teacher at the William L. Sayre Junior High School in West Philadelphia during 1979-80. The students through the stimulation and guidance of Mr. Joseph B. Jones, had an intensive, year-long experience in researching and developing various aspects of the Afro-American historic heritage of Philadelphia. Mr. Robert A. Eaverly, Principal of Sayre, provided the necessary cooperative and administrative link with the Education Development Center to make this project possible. The project was funded through a grant from the Ethnic Heritage Studies Program, U.S. Office of Education, to the Center. EDC worked simultaneously with an eighth grade at the Phillis Wheatley Middle School in Boston, Massachusetts.

The goals of the Project were:

1. To develop a model at the middle/junior high school level for engaging students, teachers, parents, senior citizens, and other community residents in **researching, documenting, interpreting, preserving, and disseminating** the Afro-American historic heritage of their city—a model that can be replicated by any ethnic group.
2. To develop an ethnic curriculum approach to using the local historical/cultural background of the Afro-American community in two cities.
3. To initiate for two school districts (Boston and Philadelphia) school-based permanent museum-resource centers for the collection, study, interpretation and preservation of local Afro-American history.

In exploring the local history of their West Philadelphia community, the students were involved in learning about **people, places, and events.** These aspects were studied through the development of two major themes or units: **Growing Up in Philadelphia—The Afro-American Experience** and **The Establishment and Growth of the West Philadelphia Black Community.**

Six approaches or methods were used separately and in an integrated fashion by the students in their historical investigations:

. . . Oral History Interviewing

. . . Family History Studies

. . . Documentary Research (both primary and secondary)

. . . Photographic Collection and Study

. . . Artifact Collection

. . . Historic Building and Landmark Studies

This publication provides you with some of the oral history material collected by the students who were "armed" with tape recorders as they moved out into their neighborhoods, community institutions or in some cases invited interviewees to their classroom to be interviewed.

ORAL HISTORY ACCOUNTS: AFRO-AMERICANS IN PHILADELPHIA

History can be thought of as a dialogue with the past. It should not be just the history of **the few**,but the history of **the many**. The great events in American history involved not only leaders but also had an enormous impact on the masses of nameless people. History must start to look at the people who couldn't write, who couldn't read and find out how they lived, coped and contributed to American history. We need to understand those events of the past, local as well as national as experienced by the winder segment of the population that has not been previously thought worth while to record and preserve.

Oral history can be defined as the tape recording of information in the form of recollections of the past from a person with first-hand knowledge.

To identify people to be interviewed the students were involved in visiting historic buildings and landmarks associated with Philadelphia's Afro-American history. They visited through field trips planned by their teacher:

Mother Bethel (African Methodist Episcopal Church) at Sixth and Lombard Streets, the first AME Church in America, founded in 1787 by Richard Allen. The Church has its own museum of historic artifacts which include the tomb of Richard Allen. Mother Bethel occupies the oldest piece of land in the United States continuously owned by lack people.

The Philadelphia Tribune offices, at 526 South 16th Street. The **Tribune** is the oldest continuously publishing black newspaper in the country. It was founded by Christopher Perry, Sr. in 1884.

The Philadelphia Public Library to study 1937 microfilm copy of the **Tribune**. The students read and studied **Tribune** coverage of the 1937 battle to abolish the dual eligibility lists for teachers (one white and one black) and the work of Floyd Logan's **Educational Equality League**.

The Stephen Smith Home at 4400 West Girard Avenue, founded in 1871 as a Home for the Aged and Infirmed by Stephen Smith, a wealthy black lumber merchant, fuel supplier and real estate dealer in Philadelphia during the 1800's. Students interviewed residents at the Home.

Tindley Temple United Methodist Church at 762 South Broad Street, founded in 1847 by ex-slave Charles Tindley. The Temple has been serving the poor and needy of all races for 143 years.

Edwin M. Stanton Elementary School at 17th and Christian Streets in South Philadelphia. Over 110 years old today, it was a predominately black elementary school that became a separate black school in 1920, through action of the Philadelphia Board of Public Education. It is a landmark in the struggle for early desegregation of the Philadelphia schools.

The 60th Street Commercial District. Students identified businesses that were operating in the early 1950's along West Philadelphia's 60th Street by studying the advertisements in the 1952 Sayre Junior High School Yearbook. They then visited the addresses to see the transition of ownership and types of businesses now on 60th Street compared to thirty years ago.

The Scottish Rite Cathedral at 1514-20 Fitzwater where students learned about the meaning and history of Free Black Masonry in the United States founded by **Prince Hall** in Boston in 1787.

South Street/South Philadelphia Neighborhood. As participant observers, the students walked the main and side streets of South Philly, the traditional Afro-American community of Philadelphia and the center of Afro-American life in the city during the 18th, 19th and early part of the 20th centuries.

The field trips also provided documentary materials for the students to read, study and discuss back in their classroom.

Individually, students identified neighbors and people in their churches whom they interviewed in the evenings and on weekends, using questionnaires developed by the Project staff and the students.

The recollections and stories told through the interviews published in this booklet can be useful in gaining understanding and feeling of the urban Afro-American history and experience in Philadelphia during the 20th century.

You will hear–

Isaac C. Peyton, age 80, a retired cook who migrated to Philadelphia from the South in 1923. He is now taking piano lessons, travelling to fulfill his life long interest in geography and doing all the things he couldn't do in his earlier years.

Leon Robinson, age 60, who was born and raised in Philadelphia and worked as a mailman for over 30 years.

Joseph B. Jones, age 46, who has lived all of his life in Philadelphia and has been a junior-high school social science teacher since 1964.

Robert A. Eaverly, age 53, born and raised in Philadelphia and now the Principal of Sayre Junior High School in Philadelphia.

Elizabeth Flora Stewart, age 57, a mother and grandmother who has raised her children and grandchildren in her native city of Philadelphia.

Sterling Bond Stewart, age 58, a chauffeur for 28 years and formerly a construction worker who has lived all of his life in Philadelphia.

Alexander Chapman, age 44, born in South Philadelphia and now a businessman–owner and operator of a hardware and bicycle repair shop on 60th Street in West Philadelphia.

Theodore Welsh, age 75, a barber whose father opened in 1907 the barbershop that he now operates. He has been cutting hair since 1934.

Raleigh H. Merritt, age 83, who studied at Tuskegee Institute (Alabama) under Dr. George W. Carver and Booker T. Washington and who has had a real estate business in Philadelphia since 1932.

Eustace Gay, Sr., age 80, born in Barbados, West Indies, who served as a reporter-writer and Managing Editor of **The Philadelphia Tribune** for over 50 years, and who is now **Chairman Emeritus** of **The Tribune**. He now resides at The Stephen Smith Home.

ISAAC C. PEYTON
Age 80

Q. Where were you born?

A. **Pensacola, Florida.**

Q. When did you move to Philadelphia?

A. **I moved to Philadelphia in February, 1923.**

Q. What was the first street you lived on in Philadelphia?

A. **Oh, I can't think of the name. It's down near 12th Street. I can't think of the name of the street. It's been so long. It's been 57 years. I can see it just as plain but can't think of the name of it . . . oh, 1122 Hall Street.**

Q. Did you move anywhere else?

A. **I moved on to Lombard Street. I think it was in, let me see, the 700 block. That was in 1923. I think I stayed there about three months.**

Q. Did you attend any schools while you were there?

A. **No. I was grown then.**

Q. Did you have a family?

A. **No, I wasn't married then. I was married in 1926.**

Q. When did you move to Pemberton Street?

A. **In July of 1949.**

Q. Could you tell me anything about the schools around here? Was Sayre Junior High here when you moved to West Philly?

A. **Yes, Sayre was here then. They had just finished building it. My youngest daughter went to Sayre.**

Q. What are your earliest memories about the city when you moved here?

A. **My neighborhood was mixed when I moved to Philadelphia. Italians, of course it was mostly**

Italian between 11th and 12th streets . . . Italians and blacks. But we got along well. There was no fighting. We got along well.

Q. What was your job or occupation when you first came to Philadelphia?

A. Well, I worked for a roofing company in 1924. It was down on South 19th Street. I hauled the material to put on the roofs when houses were built here in the 5700 block of Pemberton.

Q. When you grew up were you active in the church?

A. Very active and still active. I grew up in the church because I grew up in Mississippi. I was born in Florida and my mother moved to Mississippi when my father died. When I was age four my mother moved to Mississippi. I did my college work at Union University in Richmond, Virginia.

Q. What are your memories of church life?

A. Well, I enjoyed church life because what I am doing now I did when I was a youngster and that is teaching Sunday School. I taught Sunday School when I was at the age of 12. You don't remember, but we used to have cards and I would explain the pictures on the cards. And I was able to just look at it and explain what was happening and they gave me the job to teach those youngsters. I have been teaching Sunday School ever since I was 12 years old. And I am 80 years old and I am still teaching Sunday School at Allen AME Church.

Q. How did you and the family spend summer vacations?

A. Now, you say me and the family. The wife and I never could go off on a vacation together. If one went, the other one stayed because we never left the children for nobody else to take care of. If she went, I stayed and if I went, she stayed. We never went together to have a vacation until we were married 30 years. We got a chance to ride a train together, and we rode over to her sister's in Plainfield, New Jersey, and we spent two weeks there. And that was our first vacation after 30 years of being married. We had seven children, but we lost one. And that was the first time we had a chance to have a vacation together.

Q. Who were some of the people that influenced your life when you were growing up, besides your parents?

A. Well, I had an English teacher in my junior high. He influenced me because he always talked to me like a father and I didn't have a father. He talked to me like a father and told me the things not to do. You see, I didn't have a father and he talked to us boys and told us the right things to do. And I always looked to him like a father. His name was Professor Wiley. I'll never forget him.

Q. Did you go to the movies around here?

A. I wasn't in this part of Philadelphia when my kids were small. I lived in North Philadelphia. And my kids, when they were old enough, they went to the movies themselves. I wasn't much of a movie goer. I didn't care much for the movies. Occasionally I gave them money on Saturday to go to the movies but I never cared. I always saw that they went to Sunday School. I carried them to Sunday School and church. But movies I didn't care about.

Q. Did it cost very much?

A. No, it was very cheap. It cost 10 cents for one person. That was back in the 30's.

Q. What were the big events in the city when you were younger?

A. Well, at the time it was Woodside Park and Fairmont Park at that time. We would take the kids to Woodside Park and we would go and see the Liberty Bell. Then we would go over to where the lady who made the flag, I can't remember her name.

Q. Betsy Ross?

A. Betsy Ross. We would go over to her house, where Betsy Ross made the flag. The kids would know all those historical places because I would take them there. I used to take them to the Aquarium when it used to be under the museum out there on the Parkway. Well, we always had somewhere to take them every Sunday. This Sunday we would go to the Aquarium, the next Sunday to the museum. They went through the Planetarium too. They knew all the educational places . . . I would always take them.

Q. How many children do you have?

A. I have seven now.

Q. What changes have you seen over the years in Philadelphia?

A. Oh, I have seen so much and when I came to Philadelphia there wasn't a black face working on Market Street. Not a cashier. If you were working there it was in the back, sweeping the floor. There were no cashiers like you see the girls now pushing those buttons . . . because I guess, to tell the truth about

it, there was so much prejudice about it. They didn't want blacks to bus the dishes on the floor. They wanted the whites to do it. They wanted all the blacks out in the back. I worked for Horn and Hardart as a vegetable cook for 38 years and I know what they did to me. The changes I have seen right there on that property, because I asked them for a manager's job in 1932 and they told me right to my face, "You've got the ability but you've got the wrong color." That's what they told me. They had the credentials from the school I came out of - Union University - but they said, "you got the ability but you got the wrong color." He wouldn't give me a manager's job because I was black. He told me to my face the reason. But the Lord let me live long enough to see black managers and to have blacks on as cashiers. And I asked the Lord, "Lord, let me live long enough to see a black manager in here before I retire and a black girl." And when I left they had two black managers and two black girls cashiering. I said, "God, you answered my prayer." They have two black managers and two black cashiers. They wouldn't give it to me, but there it is.

Q. How was it financially? How much did you have to pay to stay in a house?

A. Well, rent was cheap then. You could rent a house, some houses, for $20 a month. But now you can't get anything for $20. Back then everything was cheap. That was back in the depression days. That was before your mother was born. Because my youngest is 33 and she's the baby and my oldest one is 56. Yes, I've seen so many changes in Philadelphia. I've seen the neighborhoods change. Because when I moved here it used to be mixed. Since I've been here all the whites have moved out and it's all black. And I've seen the school over there on 60th and Cedar Avenue that used to be a mixed school and now it's practically all black. When we came in the whites went to the suburbs, you see, and now they want to come back to the city because it costs so much to live in the suburbs. I've seen a lot of changes.

Q. How many years have you lived in Philadelphia?

A. Next month it will be 57 years.

Q. How about this block?

A. On this block it will be 21 years.

Q. So you have lived here a long time. What advice would you have for teenagers growing up in Philadelphia?

A. Well, I would say it like this. Stay in school for one thing. It is important to get education to get a job. Don't jump out of school. Don't get up in

your high school years and jump out of school. Go all through high school, and if you get a chance to go to college, go and get a college education. Because every job now they ask if you have two years of college education. And if you don't have two years, they don't want you. Nowadays, even people who want a babysitter want two years of college education so you can speak to their children well . . . so that they can make a decent sentence. They don't want anyone coming there saying "dis" and "dat". They don't want that. They want somebody who can speak intelligently. I've seen so many people turned down. I've seen a person right here who was capable of doing a job, but because he didn't have two years of college education, he didn't get the job.

Q. You are a piano player. What made you start playing the piano?

A. I started when I was a child. My brother was taking lessons and he didn't learn. So I said to my mother, "Mother, if you give me lessons, I will learn." And she gave me the piano and I learned how to play it. I still take lessons. I take lessons and I teach.

Q. You should have become a famous piano player.

A. Well, you see I didn't have anybody to send me to a music school . . . and anybody but a mother to help me, you see. I didn't have anybody to help me, to back me up. I wanted to go to the school I go to now. I wanted to go there when I first came to Philadelphia. I wanted to go there when I first came but I didn't have the money. My brother wouldn't help me. When I was still going to school at Union in Richmond, I would come here in the summer and work and go back in the winter . . . and he wouldn't help me, give me any money . . . and my mother couldn't give me but so much. She was living in Mississippi and I was living here. She couldn't help but so much . . . She give what she could. But as for me going to music school, I couldn't. I didn't have the money. That's why I'm in it now. Why? Because when I wanted to go I didn't have the money. I can afford the money now. I didn't let age keep me from going. And I'm the oldest one in the school down there now.

Q. You travel a lot. I know, because I've seen some of your postcards from far-out places. Could you give me a description of why you like to travel?

A. Yes, I like to travel because I always liked geography. I've gone where I always wanted to go . . . like Boston. It is an historical place; I always wanted to go and see what it was like. And I had a roommate when I was in college from Providence, R.I. And I went to Rhode Island and Providence, but I didn't have his address and I couldn't call him because I didn't know where he lived. I always wanted to go as far up as Maine, but I haven't made it

as yet. I've been to Connecticut and New York. I always wanted to see New York. I don't want New York to live in. I visit for the day and come back. You see, I don't like New York. It's too jammed for me. People are right on top of one another. I don't care for that. I like to go to Florida. I was born in Florida but I stayed away for sixty years. But I went to Florida and I went to Orlando and saw the Disney World and then from there I went to Canada. I've been to Canada twice. I went to Montreal and then I went to Niagara Falls and from Niagara Falls I went around to Toronto. And then back to home. Then I went to Pine Bluff, Arkansas. I went out there when my daughter finished college. I went out there again when my granddaughter finished college. They graduated from the same college. So I went out there twice. Let me think. I went to South Carolina. I had never been to South Carolina so I went there. And I enjoyed that trip too. The best trip that I ever had was when I went to California. When I went to California, I toured every day. I just slept in the hotel but that was all. People would call me at the hotel and the man would say, "Mr. Peyton is out." They would catch me at night because in the morning I'd be on the bus at 8:30 and touring. I went to Beverly Hills and to St. Monica. That's where Disneyland is. Disneyworld in Florida is bigger than Disneyland in California. And I have seen both of them. I really have enjoyed myself in my old age, getting about, traveling. I'm getting ready now, I don't know how soon it will be, to see the Grand Canyon. You see, I read about it in geography and I always wanted to see it, about the pretty white flowers that grow in it. I want to go and see the Grand Canyon. I want to ride in the cable car that carried you across the Grand Canyon. I wanted to see that anyhow because it is one of the wonders of the world. I love traveling. I love to fly. A train is too slow for me now. I get in a plane in a minute and be gone.

Q. I'd like to get back to the subject of your children. Did any of your children graduate from the schools in West Philly or North Philly?

A. The oldest girl, now let's see, where did she come out from? I can't think. The schools were better back then than they are now . . . much better. Philadelphia used to have the best high schools on the eastern coast. When you got trained in Philadelphia high schools, you had had what you would have in the first year at college. It was just that good. But now the schools are ridiculous. That's right. The schools are ridiculous now. If I had a child in school, I have grandchildren in school, but it's not my responsibility, I would send them to a private school. I wouldn't send them to a public school. There is no interest anymore. They don't care whether you learn or you don't learn. Because I have heard them tell my grandchildren, "All I'm looking for is my check. I don't care whether you learn or not." I've heard that spoken to my grandchildren. I tell them, "Don't let that bother you. You go ahead and do your work and then you pass out of it and get to college." That's the way you get your education. You do your work. You see, most of them

are through high school. I have one or two more left in high school. Schools now are rotten. I'm going to tell you just like it is. When my children came along, the schools were good. It was the best school system on this eastern shore. They don't have it now. They just let it go down. They don't have the good teachers like they used to. I'll tell you what they used to do. They would take the best teachers and send them out to the suburban schools. One of my girls had a friend who was a teacher and she was good at her work. And they sent here out in the suburbs to teach the white kids. That's one of the things that I know has been done. They always seek to give them the best and give you the worst. In the ghettos, they send the substitute teachers, every other day they got substitute teachers. They got nobody to see that they get anything . . . and the substitute teachers are there just to see that they get their pay. They don't care if the children learn or not . . . and I've seen that a lot. I have a daughter that is in the school system and she tells me what's happening and what's not happening. And that's how I learn what's happening in the schools.

Q. Were there any trade schools?

A. Yes, I went to Dobbins when the war broke out to learn about radio . . . to learn to fix radios. I went there to learn that. But my wife took sick and I had to give it up. I had to stay home to take care of her and take care of my family, too. I just couldn't complete it. I just lacked two-three months of completing it, but my wife got sick and I just couldn't do it.

LEON C. ROBINSON
Age 60

Q. Where were you born and when?

A. I was born September 8, 1920 at 45 North DeCalb Street, Philadelphia.

Q. What schools did you attend?

A. I went to the Hoffman School which was at 55th and Vine Street. There are projects there now. I went to the Holmes Junior High School which is located at 55th and Chestnut. Now it is presently an elementary school. Then I went to Overbrook High School at 59th and Lancaster.

Q. What were some of your earliest memories of the school?

A. I recall being recruited to go to school at an earlier age than most children. I think I was about four years old. In those days they didn't have very many children in the city and they would take youngsters four years old and place them in kindergartens where they would remain for two years until they were old enough to go to the first grade. And most of the teachers, practically all of the teachers in those years, were women. Men taught, but they taught at the higher grades . . . like the high school level.

Q. What was school like for you?

A. School for me? I would like to say that I never really did like school, though I had no problems getting through school. School was easy for me.

Q. Was there any racial discrimination?

A. If there was discrimination in the schools I didn't know anything about it. Or, let's say that I wasn't old enough to realize it. The school was together, white and black, there were more whites in the school than there were black youngsters. There were never any problems that I can recall.

Q. What did you do on Saturdays?

A. On Saturdays, as I was growing up, that would be just after or during The Depression, and I used to take a wagon, an express wagon and go to 52nd and Market Streets. That was a huge shopping area. It still is a big shopping area but not like it once was. I would carry people's packages from 9 o'clock in the morning until the stores closed, which would generally be about 9 o'clock at night. Then I would go home with my wagon and exchange my wagon for a shoeshine box. I would take my shoeshine box and return to 52nd and Market and I would remain there until midnight.

Q. Did you belong to the Boy's Club or the YMCA?

A. No, I never belonged to any Boy's Club or the YMCA, although I did go to the YMCA occasionally.

Q. What did you do at the YMCA?

A. At the YMCA there was swimming and games, like tennis, baseball. I can't recall all that. It is so far back. In those days the YMCA was mostly frequented by white children. There was a fee to belong to the YMCA and most of the black children were unable to afford the fee.

Q. How did you spend your summer vacations?

A. Summer vacations? I spent mostly at the playground at 58th and Haverford. I don't recall the name of that playground. Yes, I do. It's called the Haddington. It's still there. Today it has facilities for baseball, football, basketball and swimming. In another there are swings for the younger children. When I was going to that playground there was no swimming, but, as I say, today the facilities have been modernized.

Q. Did you travel much during the summer?

A. Not too far from the area I lived. In those days you were not quite as mobile as today. Most children didn't have the facilities to get around like they do now. In other words, the parents weren't able to afford automobiles and bicycles were something that just a few of us had.

Q. As you grew up, were you active in church?

A. Not me. I wasn't active in church, although I was forced to go to Sunday School every Sunday. My father was a deacon in the Ward AME Church at 46th and Aspen. My two brothers and I used to attend that church for several years until we transfered to St. Matthews at 57th and Summer Street.

Q. What memories do you have about church life?

A. In the church that we attended, the latter one - St. Matthews - there was a minister by the name of Reverend Lewis, who was very civic minded and he practically rebuilt that church because, when I went there, it was a small red brick building. Now it covers almost a block, a city block, and Reverend Lewis was instrumental in making the church as large as it is today.

Q. Who were some of the people that influenced you besides your parents?

A. I can think of two. They were both school teachers. One was a Mrs. Harndon. She was my teacher, I believe on the fourth grade level, and she was like a parent to me away from home. She was a very nice woman. The other teacher, I would say, was a Mr. Hamilton. I got most of my values from Mr. Hamilton. He, by the way, was an English teacher. And we had an all boys class. And we talked about many things in class besides English. Let's talk about Mr. Hamilton. He's the one I remember the most. He was an English teacher. He was a huge man, about 6'4" and he must have weighed about 250 pounds. Some of the things that I learned from him - one in particular. He used to tell us, we had an all boys class, and he would often tell us, "before you do anything to harm anybody, ask yourself, would you want this done to me. If you can answer 'yes' then go ahead and do it. But if you can't answer 'yes', then don't do it because it wasn't right."

Q. Did you go to the movie theaters often?

A I believe we went to the movies every Saturday. In those days the movies were only six cents. For grownups it was a quarter. We used to go to the Belmont Theater which was at 52nd and Market. There were also two other theaters at 52nd and Market. One is the Nixon, which I believe was just recently closed. The other was at 52nd and Chestnut, the State Theater, which has been torn down.

Q. What kind of movies did you go to see?

A. There was a variety of shows. Walt Disney . . . there was a cowboy picture . . . pictures of the winning of the West. Perhaps once in a while you would see a war picture.

Q. What problems did you and your friends face growing up in the 30's, 40's and 50's?

A. I think the greatest problem we faced was being confined to certain areas. In other words, there were certain areas you were not permitted to go into. It's similar to what the kids call today their "turf," the gangs. Only in those days we didn't have the gangs like they do today. Most of the fights were fist fights and nobody really got hurt.

Q. Did you belong to any gang or group?

A. Yes, we had a group. We didn't call ourselves a gang. Our group was from 54th and Arch and we called ourselves the 54th Streeters.

Q. What were the big events for the youth in the city when you were growing up?

A. I suppose the sports were the biggest events in my life. I used to love to go and see the baseball games. There were two baseball teams in the city when I was growing up. One was the Philadelphia Phillies, and the other was the Philadelphia Athletics. The Philadelphia Athletics have long been gone. There was a basketball team called the Warriors. There was the football team called the Eagles. But there was no hockey team. Then there was tennis. But it wasn't played to the extent it's played today.

Q. What changes have you seen in Philadelphia over the years?

A. I have seen many changes. Let's start with the fire department. When I was a little boy, the fire engines were drawn by horses. And the pumpers were fired by steam. They had to fire the boilers to make the steam to force the water out. The police force wasn't mobilized like it is today. In other words, they didn't have all the patrol cars. Most policemen were on foot and you got to know the policeman very well. He would know you, your parents, where you lived, all the kids in the neighborhood. And there was a whole lot more respect for the police than there is today. Now the transportation. Today it's mostly buses. When I was a kid, most of the transportation was trolley cars. The old elevated trains went over the river at 32nd Street and went down into the tube about 24th Street. There were two trains. One was the Frankfort El and the other was the so-called Ferry El. The Ferry El went down Market Street to Front or Delaware Avenue and went as far south as South Street. The Frankfort El went to Delaware, then up to Frankfort and terminated at Bridge Street. Since then, I would say about the late 30's, no it was later than that, I would say the 40's, the El went underground at 44th Street. It went under the river and continued up to Frankfort. No longer did it go down to South Street. The fare was two tokens for fifteen cents and you also received a pass that would allow you to ride another vehicle.

Q. How did you become interested in being a mailman?

A. I think I wanted to become a mailman, a letter carrier ever since I was about nine years old. And that was my ambition, to become a mailman. I finally got the job in 1947 when I was 26 years old.

Q. How long have you been working as a mailman?

A. I worked as a letter carrier from 1947 to 1977. I worked thirty years as a letter carrier.

Q. Were there any drug addicts on the street?

A. Yes, but not to the extent that they are today. In those days the drug addicts, the drug addiction problem was not as bad as today. It was considered a sort of stigma. But today it seems like everybody is doing it.

Q. How is Philadelphia different than it was a long time ago?

A. I guess the biggest difference would be the automobile. When I was a kid you could play in the street with relative safety. And most of the vehicles were horse drawn. Trash collection was by horse drawn vehicle. Some of the mail was delivered by horse drawn vehicles. In the late 30's and 40's there were delivery trucks. They were just beginning to replace the horse drawn vehicles.

Q. How is life different in the 80's from the 40's?

A. The biggest difference, I would say, is the price and the cost of living. In the 40's, if you made 20-30 dollars a week, you were able to live off it.

Q. What advise do you have for teenagers growing up in Philadelphia.

A. I would say, to be sure to go to school and get your schooling because in today's world, if you don't have any schooling, it is very hard to find a job.

JOSEPH B. JONES
Age 46

Q. I would like to talk to you this afternoon about what it was like for you growing up in Philadelphia. Were you born in Philadelphia?

A. I was born in Jefferson Hospital, and we lived in South Philadelphia.

Q. What street did you live on?

A. 18th Street.

Q. What are your earliest memories of the street that you lived on and the house you lived in? How far back can you remember?

A. I can go back to at least 1939. There were trolley cars running down 18th Street. I can remember a lady called Miss Ida, who lived across the street. She had a little restaurant and she would only open on the weekends. I remember her very well. I remember a black-owned coal yard. A Mr. Horn at the corner of 18th and Kater Street. And they used to go upstate in trucks and bring their coal back. I can remember standing on the corner of 18th and South Street and selling the Philadelphia Daily News for 2 cents. I can remember the saloon on one corner of 18th and South . . . I can't recall its name . . . I think it was Campbells. On the other side of 18th and South, I would say the southwest corner, there was a bar, a very fancy saloon called the Brown Bomber, and that bar was named after Joe Louis, who had become a black hero, folk hero, a real hero before they toppled him. And I remember seeing a man in a convertible green Buick park in the front in 1939-1940. I remember the old folks talk . . . I call them old. They were the sporting set. I remember that vividly. I remember Ella Fitzgerald singing "A tisket, a tasket, I lost my yellow basket." We lived in an apartment, on the second floor back. There was an empty lot in the back where we used to play.

Q. Mr. Jones, when you started school, what was the first elementary school that you attended in Philadelphia?

A. I started elementary school in 1940 at the Edwin Stanton Elementary School at 17th and Christian Street.

Q. Was that kindergarten or first grade?

A. I started in kindergarten.

Q. What are your earliest memories of kindergarten? What was it like?

A. Our parents had to purchase us a little rug that we had a nap on and we had graham crackers and milk. And even then I thought I liked a girl named Doris Ann Watson. She later became the first black telephone operator in the city of Philadelphia.

Q. What do you remember about the early elementary years, say grades one, two and three? Did you like school?

A. Yes, I liked school. You must remember that by the time I got to the first grade the second World War had begun. I remember Miss Donaldson was my grade 1A teacher. We had 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, then. Most of my teachers were kindly middle-aged ladies and many of them did not live too far from the Stanton School. I remember Miss Sullivan in the 5th grade, whom I have run into in the Acme and the Pantry Pride Market. I asked her if she still remembered me and she did, vaguely. My elementary school was very exciting because I remember something very important. I am going to recite it for you. We used to have a May Day play and I was given the role of Simple Simon and I can remember part of the lines I had to recite on this wooden stage in our yard. It is this—"I'm Simple Simon. You've heard of me. Why I've come down from history. Although I've never had a cent, I've followed this pieman wherever he went." That was the role I played on May Day. That was a very big day for us . . . I remember.

Q. Do you remember in elementary and junior high school if Afro-American history was taught?

A. Not in the formal sense that it is taught now. I was talking with my ninth graders the other day. I cannot think of this black lady's name, but in the midst of the second World War, there was always a picture of this black General with one star. I was much too young and immature to understand what the teacher was trying to tell us. But in the center of the room there was this picture of Benjamin Davis, Sr., the first black General in U.S. history.

Q. Mr. Jones, tell me a little bit about what you and your brothers and classmates did after school.

A. Half a block from the Stanton Elementary School was the YMCA. It is still there in the 1700 block of Christian Street. The YMCA was a very good recreational vehicle. The playground which was renamed the Marion Anderson Recreational Center at 17th and Fitzwater Street, was an excellent recreational vehicle . . . You see, in order to get to Stanton you had to walk by Marion Anderson Recreational Center so you would stop over and play. We did a lot of playing in the streets too . . . in the small streets.

Q. What things went on at the Y at that time?

A. Well, at the Y we had swimming, basketball, volleyball, checkers, chess. I didn't attend the Y as much as I wish I had because there was a man at the "Y" named Tick Coleman who really influenced the lives of some young people, like the present Judge Julian King. He went to the "Y" as did some other very successful black men.

Q. Mr. Jones, did you have any jobs after school in junior and senior high? Did your classmates work?

A. Many of us were desperate for jobs. I had a newspaper route that took me through South Philly as far as Catherine Street around the the McCoach playground. I had a Saturday job where I worked for the Royal Theater. It was on South Street. I used to deliver circulars. I used to walk all day Saturday for two dollars putting circulars of the coming attractions under people's doors. I used to love to shovel snow to earn a few pennies.

Q. How did you spend your summers?

A. Not very exciting, I would say. I always wanted to spend as much time as I could with my aunts and uncles in Alexandria, Va. On several occasions I took my earliest train ride by myself to Washington, D.C. when I was nine years old in a pin-striped suit. My aunt met me. Summers meant more or less playing, being in the hot sun or whatever, baseball, primarily because we used to love to go to the McCoach playground. But summers, I can't say summers were overly exciting except when I traveled.

Q. Did many of your classmates and neighbors travel south in the summer?

A. Yes, I can recall. I used to think that they were very, very fortunate. My grandmother in Alexandria did not have a farm but my other grandmother - my father's mother - and brothers did have a farm. But I never did go as far as Lawrenceville, Virginia in my youth.

Q. What about your church life? Were you active in any church group as a young person in Philadelphia?

A. Yes, I was very active, now that I think about it. We used to look forward to the picnics at the church. We used to come up to Huntington Park in North Philly and you would think we were going to California. I went to the Union Baptist Church. I was Baptist at that time and I used to go to Sunday School. I was greatly influenced by going to church. Rev. Kirkland was the minister, who later moved his church here to 63rd and Ludlow.

Q. You mention going to North Philadelphia as going a long distance. Can you tell me a little bit about where the black families were living when you were

growing up in South Philly. Were there black people, for example, here in West Philadelphia?

A. West Philadelphia for me was another trip. I can speak on it somewhat because even in elementary school I used to go to the dentist on Chancelor Street where I think the big clock is still there. It was the Philadelphia Dental Society subsidized by the city and the state. It cost 50 cents to have a tooth pulled or filled. And when I got off the El at 52nd and Market Street, the people that I saw were white because the area was predominately white.

Q. What kind of movies were playing in the theaters when you were growing up?

A. Well, we had movies, several of what we call the big budget movies. But most of the movies were what we call B movies - a rather simple plot. I used to love to go to the movies on Saturday. I remember the first time I ever came out of the movies at night. I was shocked because I had never gone to the movies and come out at night. It was dark when we came out of the Royal Theater. The Wizard of Oz was a spectacle. But generally the movies we saw were a double feature on Saturday at the Royal Theater. It would be a John Garfield movie and a western. The western would generally last for an hour. And there would be a serial. A serial was a continuous run of 15-minute shorts with a plot and a sub-plot. Generally at the end of the 15-16 minutes the star of the serial was in danger. And to find out how he escaped that danger you had to come back the next Saturday. These serials ran for about 15 consecutive Saturdays. When one ended and the hero rode away in the sunset or whatever, they would start another. Plus, also, the Royal Theater gave away little brown envelopes and you could get up to a dollar but most of us got a penny as a gimmick, a promotional gimmick to get us there.

Q. How long was the Royal Theater there?

A. The Royal Theater was a very old theater once owned by Philadelphia blacks. And then whites bought it and built it up into a fairly decent top-notch movie house after they played in town. Today you have to go to the Fox or the Stanley in town, but the Royal Theater always got the movies after they had been in town, because the black folks in South Philly always went to the Royal Theater, instead of going in town and paying the higher price to see a movie . . . they would wait a couple of weeks and see it at the Royal Theater.

Q. How much did the movies cost?

A. I used to go to the Royal Theater for 10 cents on Saturday.

Q. What did you do with the money you made?

A. I shared that with my mother, and kept some money for myself. When you speak of earning money . . . . I used to sell Mother's Day flowers. Palm Sunday always come before Mother's Day. I would get some Palms and make crosses - 50 cents or a dollar's worth of palms and my profit would run to 5 or 6 dollars. With that 5 or 6 dollars I would go down to 4th and Market Street before Mother's Day and buy carnations. I never will forget one Mother's Day I made 32 dollars selling flowers and I bought a suit of clothing at Krass Brothers.

Q. Was there a lot of discrimination when you were growing up?

A. There was what we called outward discrimination and inward discrimination. I remember in my youth there was a restaurant chain that would not serve blacks. It was called Thompson's. When the court ordered Thompson to serve blacks food in Philadelphia, they closed. I remember the almost riot . . . I call it that because it bordered on a riot . . . when they wanted black trolley-car drivers. When PTC, which was the transportation company, went to hire black motormen to drive the trolleys, the whites resented it and went on strike. And there was trouble . . . we don't see many trolley cars now.

Q. Why did you decide to be a teacher?

A. Well, there are many factors that influenced me. I was in the Air Force for 4 years. I went in the Air Force when I was 17 years old. When we got off the bus, we call it disembarking, some very nasty things were said to me. They were raw recruits and I never did forget it. Then I asked myself what separates an officer from me? That was an education. Except I didn't know what area I wanted to go into. In the interim, being the youngest of three, my oldest brother had left the army, started going to college and he became a teacher. I more or less said, "I'll try teaching, too." But what influenced me, to some degree, was living across the street from Sayre. I was working at night. I used to cut the grass in the day. I said to myself, one day maybe I can do a good job teaching and use what we called the G.I. bill - the federal government helped to pay for my college in the day while I worked at night at the Post Office.

Q. What do you remember about the gang problem in Philadelphia?

A. I was never a part of the real big gangs in South Philly. But I can think of them and I still see some of the members. I moved from 18th Street - my mother did - to 1515 Bainbridge Street and two blocks from me was 13th Street. That 13th Street gang was notorious. There were not many vicious killings. There was the 13th Street gang. There was the Bucaneers, right across from the Junior High where I went. They controlled the dances at the "YW" or "YMCA" or at the Boys Club. You had to come by them. I never will forget this young lady - but I don't think I would know her if I saw her now - but she was affiliated wth the 13th Street gang and her nickname was Mama-Too-

Tight. And she was tight. I understand she whipped many a young fellow. They used to control a place called the Olympia Ballroom - I think it still stands today on Broad Street between Fitzwater and Bainbridge Street. But Mama-Too-Tight was from 13th Street. It appeared to me in my youth that the 13th Street and the Road gang were always feuding . . . territory and turf were very important things. I do know there were areas in South Philly I did not go because I did not feel like being frisked. On my newspaper route I know I was robbed at least once. I picked up a bottle and tried to find the young tough but I couldn't. Who did I run into but my mother . . .

ROBERT L. EAVERLY
Age 53

Q. Where were you born and when?

A. I was born here in Philadelphia in April, 1927.

Q. Mr. Eaverly, in what part of the city did you grow up?

A. We lived in South Philadelphia on Federal Street. The block that I lived in was the 1700 block which would be three blocks west of Broad Street.

Q. What are your earliest memories of your home and the neighborhood that you lived in? How far back do you remember?

A. I can remember some of the early days a lot better than I can remember some of the recent days. I remember my boyhood very well because I had a very happy childhood. My brother and I did all the kinds of things that boys do. We used to play a lot of touch football which we used to call rugby in South Philly in those days. We also played "half-ball" with a broomstick and half a rubber ball and "dead-bop" which was "shooting" checkers from square to square marked in chalk on the cement pavement. We played a lot of pinochle . . . learned to play pinochle when we were 8 and 9 years old.

And life was very, very pleasant as I recall it. I especially remember milk bottles, with the cream on top, loaves of bread, and blocks of ice all being delivered by horse and wagon. We did a lot of roaming around in the neighborhood in those days. The sort of gangs that exist today didn't exist to the same extent when I was a boy. I used to roam all over Philadelphia, as a matter of fact, when I was a teenager. But as a boy I do rember running errands for neighbors. In those days you could return bottles and get deposit money. There was a movie theater right around the corner from our house and on Saturday they would show one movie and you could stay in the theater for about four hours and see the things over and over. You got a serial, a couple of cartoons, a double feature, the preview of coming attractions and generally they would give away something like dishes, through some kind of a contest on the screen. And they would let you get into the theater with ten half tickets. If you could find ten half tickets that people had used before, then you could get into the movie free that day.

Q. What was the theater?

A. The Globe Theater. That was on 17th Street between Federal and Ellsworth.

Q. What school did you first attend?

A. I went to E.M. Stanton Elementary School at 17th and Christian Streets for six years.

Q. What are some your early memories at the Stanton School . . . the teachers and what you studied?

A. First of all I liked school. I used to try to cooperate with my teachers. My brother didn't like school quite as much as I did and he got in a little difficulty now and then. Basically we did what we were asked to do. School was a lot different in those days. Everybody was scared to death of the principal. The principal was an elderly lady named Miss Grimes and if you were called down to see Miss Grimes you were "shaking like a leaf" before you went down there. The teachers were very strict and there was none of the disorder that you see in some of the schools today. I remember that we got a lot of assignments to do and we did them. There was no question about it.

Q. What was the racial makeup of the South Philadelphia community that you grew up in?

A. It was basically a black community but we had some white families. Even in our block there were some white families. Some of my best friends who were my age and some who were older than me were children of the Italian shoemaker who lived right across the street from my father's dental office. My father was a dentist and we lived right next door to a drugstore. And incidentally, that was my first job - working in the drugstore.

Q. What age did you start working?

A. I was thirteen.

Q. What did you do in the drugstore?

A. I was a soda jerk. The students today might not know what that term means. You don't see soda fountains in drugstores any more. In those days every drugstore had an ice cream parlor with seats and stools where everybody sat down and you could get a soda, or a sundae or a scoop of ice cream. The person that served it was called a soda jerk. That was my first job.

Q. How much did you get paid for soda jerking?

A. As I recall I must have made something like a dollar and a quarter a day for putting about 5-6 hours a day in the drugstore. Maybe 7 dollars a week working after school every day.

Q. Did you belong to the Y or Boys' Club or some church organization?

A. Well, first of all I went to Sunday School just about every Sunday. We belonged to the First African Baptist Church at 16th and Christian Streets. My brother and I got into the Boy Scouts when we were 13-14 years old. As far as the Y was concerned it was the Christian Street YMCA . . . I learned how to play ping pong and I belonged to one of the youth groups and I have been associated with that branch practically all my life. Today I'm a member of the Board.

Q. Who were some of the prominent youth workers and leaders at the Y at that time? Are they still around today in Philadelphia?

A. Unfortunately no. The member that I knew . . . the minister of my church, Rev. Harrod, he was an old man when I was a boy. He passed on before I became a teenager. He was succeeded by a Rev. Charles Lee who has since passed on. The Y was directed by a man named Milton Washington and he died about 5-6 years ago. So I would say that most of the adult leaders that I knew at that time have since passed on.

Q. Mr. Eaverly, did you spend much time in the movie theater when you were growing up?

A. Quite a bit. In addition to the early days of the Globe Theater on 17th Street, when I was a teenager the big thing was to go to the Earle Theater which was then, I believe, at 12th and Market Street. They had stage shows there. All the big bands played - Lionel Hampton, Count Basie, Duke Ellington. It was a big thing to go to the stage show at the Earle. Now in West Philadelphia . . . 52nd Street had something like 3-4 big theaters on it when I was a teenager. Because I grew up in West Philadelphia, even though I was born in South Philly. I remember the State Theater on 52nd and Chestnut. There was the Nixon Theater, there was the Belmont Theater and one more I can't recall.

Q. You mentioned that you were born in South Philly and spent early years there. When did you move to West Philly?

A. I moved to West Philly when I went to high school. From E.M. Stanton Elementary I went to Barratt Junior High School, on 16th and WhartonStreets in South Philly. When I went to senior high I went to Central High. My family moved to West Philly to 50th and Haverford about that time.

Q. Would you give us some recollections of your junior high years?

A. Well, it was much different from Sayre. First of all, our halls stayed quiet when classes passed. They insisted upon it. Again, we had a principal named Mr. Beatty at Barratt Junior High. You never saw him but you felt his presence all the time. We had a lot of students who went to Barratt at that time who have since gone onto be successful in various ways. Judge Julian King, for example. He was a little after me but he certainly came through Barratt. Mr. Poindexter, who later became Executive Deputy of schools in Philadelphia, lived near Barratt and was Principal of Barratt for a time although he came after me. This is not to paint a rosy picture and say that we didn't have our problems. I do remember that the gangs were starting up at that time. There was a gang called Robin Hood and his Merry Men. This fellow Robin Hood would visit schools - I don't think he was in school himself - but he would go around from school to school and pick up his collection money. Well, they tried to get me to pay collection money a couple of times but you see I lived in the neighborhood and I knew all the tough guys and others as well who weren't so tough. The gang boys in my neighborhood, although they didn't try to force me to join, usually tried to protect me in some way. And I was never victimized in that way. This Robin Hood character - the police finally caught up with him and they broke up his little strong arm operation. But I do remember him coming

around. But in those days also there was no such thing as anybody shooting anybody, cutting anybody. I can recall if you had an argument with anybody you waited till after school and you met them on the corner or in the school yard later and had it out with them and that was it.

Q. Mr. Eaverly, who were some of the people in your life that influenced you as you were growing up, besides your parents?

A. One man was the man who was my scout master in the Boy Scouts, a man named Edgar Lowber. He must be up in his late 70's or early 80's now, if he is still alive. I've seen him once or twice in the last three or four years. He was really very, very dedicated to that Boy Scout troop and I would have to say that he gave much more than was expected of him to help us in the various activities. I went to Cheyney State College and there were several people out there that contributed a great deal to me. One was Mrs. Catherine Wilson, who later became supervisor of student teachers and has since retired from Cheyney. She was a great inspiration to me. I went to Cheyney State College preparing to be a teacher. And during my four years at Cheyney, I learned what it took to be a teacher. I didn't really want to become a principal until I had been teaching for about 6-7 years. Then the idea of becoming a principal became important to me.

ELIZABETH FLORA STEWART
Age 57

Q. Where were you born and when?

A. I was born in West Philadelphia General Hospital in 1923.

Q. What streets did you live on in Philadelphia?

A. I lived at 57th and Cherry, next at 57th and Appletree and now my residence is 160 North Dewey Street.

Q. What are your earliest memories about your neighborhood?

A. As a child I grew up on Cherry Street. The neighborhood was very nice. The children were very nice. That's as much as I can remember. I grew up as a teenager on Appletree Street.

Q. What schools did you attend? What were your earliest memories of school and what was school like for you?

A. I attended John Barry School at 59th and Race. I graduated from there and went to Shoemaker Junior High for a year. I left Shoemaker Junior High and transferred to Holmes Junior High. I graduated from Holmes Junior High and from there I went to Overbrook High. I came out of Overbrook at the tenth grade.

Q. What was school like for you?

A. School was very nice until the last couple of years.

Q. As you were growing up, what did you do on Saturdays?

A. I had my housework to do. We would clean the house and our parents would give us money and we would go to the movies.

Q. How did you spend your summer vacations?

A. Well, just playing around and taking care of the house. Just playing around.

Q. Did you travel much during the summer?

A. No, my family wasn't able to.

Q. When you were growing up were you active in church and what memories do you have of church life?

A. I have plenty of memories of church life. I grew up in the church. My father belonged to church all of his life. He was an usher and we had to go to church. We started out with Sunday School every Sunday morning. We would come home from Sunday School and have breakfast and then go back to 11 o'clock service and come home and have dinner. And then in the evening go back to BYPU. * On Sundays all we did was go to church all day and come home and have meals.

Q. What did you and your friends do for recreation?

A. As a teenager growing up we used to go to dances and have house parties. That's all.

Q. Who were some of the people that influenced you that you remember as you were growing up, besides your parents?

A. Well, I had an uncle who used to play the drums and we used to go to hear him if he was playing in a nice place.

Q. Did you go to the movie theater often and what kinds of movies did you see? How much did they cost?

A. At that time when I was going to the movies, they cost 10 cents. We used to see Clark Gable, Roy Rogers, a lot of cowboy pictures - all the old movie stars that have gone on now.

Q. What problems did you and your friends face growing up in the 30's, 40's and 50's in Philadelphia?

A. Well, we really didn't have all those problems like you children have today. Back in the 40's, the late 30's and the early 40's, things was much different than today. Children didn't fight and shoot and carry on like they do now. They did it but they didn't do it as bad and as much.

Q. What were the big events for the children and youth of the city when you were growing up?

A. Well, we used to like in the spring when our high school classes would go to our football games and our basketball games. Then we would go on school trips . . . Those were our big adventures. We did a lot of nice things.

*Baptist Young People's Union

Q. What changes have you seen in Philadelphia over the years?

A. There have been many, many changes in Philadelphia over the years. Things are much different than they used to be. Things are much higher. Clothes are higher, furniture and food too. The cost of living is much higher than in the days when I was growing up.

Q. What advice do you have for children growing up in Philadelphia today?

A. Well, I have plenty of advice. Don't be meddling and peddling in dope. Don't be under the influence of drinking and shooting the needle. It's not good for you. It will kill you. We didn't do all that stuff when we was coming along. Children are much different today than when I was growing up. We used to listen to other grownups when they told us something. Today you can't talk to children, you can't tell them anything. If you aren't a parent or related to them, they give you a hard time. They just won't listen anyway.

STERLING BOND STEWART
Age 58

Q. Where were you born and when?

A. In Philadelphia, March 9th, 1922.

Q. What streets did you live on?

A. Well, I lived on several but I will name two or three. I lived on Beach Street, 200 block, North Beach, and I lived on Roger Street, 500 block, and now I live on Dewey Street, 100 block.

Q. What are your earliest memories of the streets that you lived on when you were very young?

A. The neighborhoods that I lived in when I was very young, they were very nice neighborhoods. The people were smiling at everybody. It was like a community, friendly and whatever.

Q. What schools did you attend? What are your earliest memories of school and what was school like for you?

A. I attended Hoffman School when I was very young. At that time I never liked school. Later I liked it. I ended up going to Hanna; it was sort of like a vocational school.

Q. When you were growing up, what did you do on Saturdays?

A. On Saturdays we had certain chores to do before we could do any playing. Chop wood, bring up coal, go to the store, clean our rooms, the cellar, whatever our parents had told us to do.

Q. Did you belong to the Boys Club, YMCA or any neighborhood clubs?

A. Well, I was a Boy Scout when I was about ten at St. Matthews . . . you know what boy scouts do. You do a lot of walking and camping and so forth. We really enjoyed that.

Q. When you were growing up did you have any jobs when you were in school?

A. Oh, yes. I had jobs. I was just like a domestic. I had two jobs. One was cleaning an apartment for which I received 50 cents. Another was cleaning a whole house for which I received 75 cents. And that's what I called extra work. I was about 13 years old then.

Q. How did you spend your summer vacations?

A. On summer vacations we weren't fortunate enough to go away on vacation, but we made the best of it. After we did our chores around the house, we was able to play over at the playground. We played ball, marbles, and hockey on skates. We really enjoyed ourselves in those days.

Q. Did you travel much during the summer?

A. No. We didn't do much traveling in those days. I came from a big family and it was hard.

Q. Were you active in church work and what memories do you have about church life?

A. We had to go to Sunday School, then we had to go to church. And then we turned around and went to BYPU.* It was just like going to movies on Saturday night. We would visit different churches and see how they ran their churches. We really enjoyed it.

Q. What did you and your friends do for recreation? Where did you go for recreation?

A. We went to the movies. And if we didn't do that we would be at the corner and tell stories of the pictures that we had seen. Things like that. We weren't what they call mischievous. We had a club where we danced and so forth.

Q. Who were some of the people in your life that influenced you or that you remember growing up besides your parents?

A. We had the boxer Joe Louis. We had Paul Robeson the great opera singer, and we had different band leaders that were out at the time - Chick Webb, Lionel Hampton. These were several people that I liked at that time.

Q. Did you go to the movies often? What kind of movies did you see? How much did the movies cost?

A. We went to the movies. The earliest days I can remember going to the Belmont which cost 10 cents, and they gave you a grab bag that might have anywhere from one to five cents in it. We saw the main pictures which was a cowboy picture along with the other picture that was shown. If it wasn't a cowboy picture, we didn't consider ourselves going to the movies.

*Baptist Young People's Union

Q. Where did you go to junior high school and what do you remember about it?

A. It was like a vocational school . . . we learned different trades.

Q. What problems did you and your friends face growing up in the 30's, 40's, and 50's in Philadelphia?

A. Well, you had a problem getting jobs. Jobs weren't too easy to get. I got married in '41 and came through the hard times, not making much money. Fortunately we weren't on relief because it wasn't that easy to get on then. But we survived. We brought up four children and today we have fourteen grandchildren . . . as I said before, relief was a thing you just didn't go down and ask for. You had to struggle along.

Q. Did you belong to any neighborhood gangs or groups?

A. Yes, we had a club which they called at that time the Junior Barons. We participated in dancing. We also had recordings . . . we used to play for different parties. We traveled all around.

Q. Why did you join a gang or group?

A. I was never in a gang. Ours was a club and it wasn't what was considered a bad club.

Q. What were the big events for children and youth in the city when you were growing up?

A. Well, we had so many activities, as I say, enjoying life - baseball, football, kick the stick. We played marbles, dead blocks, different games like that. We amused ourselves. Oh, what do you call it . . . machines?

Q. Pinball machines?

A. Yes, we even went so far as to make our own pinball machines and play money, and we just got along fine.

Q. What changes have you seen in Philadelphia over the years?

A. Well, over the years I've seen where people really come from. I do remember myself when you could see each one's different ribs. I notice as the years pass by they are fat and I'll say up until 1950 there weren't too many cars that people owned or homes. After that, after the war people start progressing from that . . . from defense jobs, saving the bonds and buying homes, even having

savings accounts. It's been a big change since 1940.

Q. What advice do you have for teenagers growing up in Philadelphia today?

A. Get all the education they can because it's there and there's no way they can get by on somebody getting them a job. They have the opportunity. Take advantage of it. Be able to name their price instead of a man naming his price because he doesn't know enough. In our times we didn't have the opportunities. You just had to take what you could get.

Q. Did the whites always bother with the blacks in the 1940's, and 30's and 50's?

A. Yes, it was always like this that when you went into a white neighborhood they would bother you and when they came into our neighborhoods, we would bother them. But it wasn't a case that somebody got killed or anything like that. You had to stand up for youself. Nobody got real hurt that you had to go to the hospital or anything. In the times that I was coming along in the neighborhoods, used to be that we went up to the park at 58th and Girard. One night we would chase the white boys and the next night they chased us. They had an Italian cop down there, and when he came along he chased us all. He had a night club, and if he tripped you, he'd whack you on the butt. He didn't abuse you. We gave him a lot of respect. And also the other cops . . . the cops on the corner, we gave them the corner. There was never no name calling, anything like that. The cop should have been respected because he was out there to protect us. And that was it. Some things we just got used to, and it was common that if you were colored and you had a nice looking car, they'd stop you at the corner. At the time, in my younger days, I was one of the fellows that had a car, since I was 16 years old I've never been without one. They weren't big cars, but I kept them clean. As I say, it was little colored people that had cars . . . it was noticeable. It was common . . . they just stopped you. But you didn't pay it no mind because it was common.

ALEXANDER CHAPMAN
Age 44

Q. Where were you born, Mr. Chapman?

A. I was born in Philadelphia on January 2, 1936, in the Pennsylvania Hospital.

Q. And where were you living then?

A. In South Philadelphia. I spent the first 22 years of my life in South Philadelphia.

Q. Where were your parents from?

A. My father was born in Philadelphia and my mother was from Enfield, North Carolina.

Q. What do you remember about being young and growing up in South Philadelphia?

A. People sharing and caring. Unlike today you didn't have all the bars . . . and you had surrogate parents. If I did something wrong and a neighbor saw me they would whale the daylights out of me and they would tell my parents. You see, what is lacking in the community today is respect for older people. It seems to have diminished. There seems to be none. Children 9 and 10 years old want to 29 and 30.

Q. Tell me about South Philly in terms of the streets you lived on, the open areas; where did you play, before your teenage years?

A. I lived across from a school, the Edwin M. Stanton School at 17th and Christian Streets. Most of my playing was done in that school yard. And as I was older I went to the Marian Anderson Playground . . . at that time known as the McCoach playground. We had the Christian Street Y which was right around the corner. And a block and a half away was the girls Y. They were the four basic places I remember playing as a youth.

Q. What elementary school did you go to?

A. To the Edwin M. Stanton, right across the street from where I was born.

Q. Did you enjoy school?

A. In the beginning, yes. My junior high school days I didn't enjoy. But it wasn't a case that the school wasn't good but the fact that my father was unemployed for a long time and I felt ashamed to go to school because I

didn't always have new clothes. I have since learned that that was so silly on my behalf.

Q. What kind of work did your father do before he was unemployed?

A. Let me tell you a little about my father. My father graduated from Central High School, where Ben Franklin now is, in 1933. There were only two Negro men to come out of Central High School in his class, my father and another. They were the only two to graduate. However, coming out of high school in the commercial course you could do absolutely nothing for no one. So my father always had a lot of odd jobs. He could do so many things that it overwhelmed me. Nothing was too big for him. We didn't have store bought tables and what have you. We had tables that my father made that my mother still possesses, two of them, right now. Time again, here is where peer pressure comes in. My friends would razz me, "you have homemade furniture." But I never realized the beauty and workmanship of the handcrafted furniture. I guess it's a case of too little too late because if life would give me reruns I would do things a lot different and cherish the things that I had. I would turn that anger into love and warmth, but life doesn't give you that chance. My father, to answer your question about the kind of job he had, he had a lot of odd jobs and during the war years he worked in the defense plants. My father was also crippled in one leg. That was a strike against him. After the war my father didn't work for about two years with a steady job. He worked on construction gangs off and on. Then he finally got a job in a laundry which was not good for him with his bad leg because he was always in water. But in this lifetime we do what we have to in order to survive.

Q. Moving on, where did you go to high school?

A. I went to Bok Vocational and Technical High School.

Q. What did you study there?

A. Woodworking–taking after my father.

Q. What year did you finish high school?

A. 1954. And I went to the Air Force in March of 1954. Spent three years in the Air Force.

Q. What were your high school years like?

A. Pretty good. I wanted to run on the track team but I never could. I wanted to be manager of the track team. I thought it was very exciting. It was just at the time, there were a lot of guys better than me. But now I blame

myself, looking back in retrospect I don't think I gave it all I had, stick-to-it-ness. I think I gave up too easily. As I have gotten older I've learned that if you fail the first time you bounce back.

Q. Going through junior and senior high school, what did you do besides sports? What things did boys your age do?

A. Basketball. That was the big thing. We were really not into organized sports per se. What we did was play pick-up basketball because it was inexpensive. Money was not as plentiful as it is now.

Q. In addition to your mother and father's influence on you, what other people were in your life as a teenager that influenced you beside your parents?

A. Two. One is a funeral director who is now deceased, Walter H. Cassell. And another man is why I really went to woodwork. He was in funeral supplies and that's a field that black people don't get into, that they look at as morbid. But it is very, very lucrative. The most interesting thing about Mr. Tooks is that he would sponsor . . . he would place money with the Y for kids who weren't able to buy a membership. I thought that was outstanding. It was done before all of these grants and whatnot became known. Here was a man who really believed . . . he believed in the community, he believed in black youth. He put his money where is mouth was. He got no publicity. I doubt if very many people remember him unless they lived there in those days. He died in 1951, if I'm not mistaken. His business was located on the corner of . . . it's not there any longer, of Washington Avenue and Colorado Street. He got me involved with woodworking by sweeping the floor and what have you. It was amazing how they would take chips and pieces of wood and whatnot and how they could use them . . . it was very, very lucrative. That's what we have to do. Look around and see what goods and services are needed in our community. I hear people say they would not live in a high rise building, yet the most influential people in America live in high rise buildings. It's just that the goods and services aren't supplied to the black buildings, the buildings that are predominantly black.

Q. When you got out of high school you said you went into the service. What years were you in the service?

A. I did three years and eight months and came out with an honorable discharge which I am very proud of. I was in the U.S. Air Force. I did my basic training at Geneva, New York. From there I went to school in Cheyenne, Wyoming to become a teletype operator. From there I went to Alaska to a remote site 36 miles off the coast of Nome, an island known as St. Lawrence Island. I spent a year and 14 days there and then I spent the rest of my

time in Washington, D.C. My service years were not the best years of my life, but I think that it was due to my thinking in that period of life.

Q. So you came back to Philly in 1957? What did you do at that point?

A. At that time, when I came back to Philadelphia I was married and I started a family.

Q. Tell me about your children. How many do you have?

A. I have six children.

Q. And their names and ages?

A. Carl is 25, Alex is 23, Ethel is 22, Martha is 20, Steven is 18, and Elizabeth is 17. Elizabeth will graduate from high school in June of this year, then she will attend Community College in Philadelphia. Carl is an engineer by education. Alex is a graphic designer. Steven graduated in June 1979 and he is going to work in the store that I am going to open in June down the street from where I am presently located . . . 167 South 60th Street. It is remarkable in the fact that Steven is 18 years old and he will be working his own business. Among the other things that I have done; I am a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania - the Wharton School of Commerce and Finance, night school graduate. It took me six years to get a two-year degree. I say that because during the time that I was attending school I was also in the process of working at the Post Office during the day and selling real estate and insurance at night and going to school. Some years it was two nights a week, one year not at all. My wife was taken gravely ill. She had some very serious operations. We didn't know if she was going to live or not. Once we got over that I started to resume my education again. It didn't come easy. But I am very, very proud of that little associate degree. Other people may have their doctorate and whatnot and I don't think I will get any more but that means something to me. Jumping ahead a little bit, in 1971, in my marketing class the project that was assigned to each student was to go out in the community and—you must remember that I am a night student and unlike the day student, night students come from all over the city - it was a good project for night students. We had to go out in the community and find out what was needed in our community. I came up here on 60th Street and I looked around and tried to think what would be a good business that would add to the community. We have enough bars, and bar-be-cue joints and hobby shops. I'm talking about a real business. And the idea hit me of a hardware store. And that's what I decided to do, after doing a survey I realized that a hardware store was something that was needed. Just about this time was when my wife became very, very ill. This time I was also involved on a part-time basis of selling real estate and insurance. I sold a hardware store . . . because of the uncer-

tainty of my wife's condition and not being certain of what I wanted to do, I didn't buy it myself. Many days I regretted it afterwards. However, after coming to grips with myself and the many things that were happening in my life rather than to buy one that already existed because I did not have that kind of money and federal monies were not available, I just started up one of my own . . . April 19, 1976 was my first day of business . . . not at this location. I started at the corner of 60th and Walnut. I was there approximately a year. My lease was from April 1976 to March 1977. The building that I am presently in I own one hundred percent. When the building became available it was a fixer-upper. It was at a very moderate price. I seized the opportunity and I purchased the building in November. It took about four months doing odds and ends to get things in order and on March 1, 1977 I moved in. The months between November and March were used to clean out the building . . . getting it in liveable condition. There was an awful lot of work to be done. And I did as much as I could before I came over because I was still operating the other store. I worked here in the evenings.

Q. Did you have the bicycle repairing and supplies in the other store?

A. No, that is a new addition to this building. I got involved with the bicycles on a very limited basis across the street but my landlord wouldn't allow me to utilize her building in that capacity. When I got this building, as you know there is an upstairs here . . . I turned the stairs around, put a wall and a door up and instead of making the upstairs an apartment I've made it into my office and into my bicycle shop. Bicycles are a big thing. I think they will be even a bigger thing in the future. And you can make a living just off of bicycles if you wanted to do that. I choose to do bicycles and hardware because I live in the community. People's problems in the community are my problems and I'm going to die in the community.

Q. How long have you lived in this community?

A. Twenty-two years.

Q. When you and your wife first moved to West Philly, what was the community like? What did it feel like to you?

A. At the time when we first moved out here West Philadelphia was an integrated community . . . with businesses and shops. You could buy everything you wanted from soup to nuts. You had no need to go downtown. However, as the neighborhood changed for one reason or another, businesses and services declined. People moved out, moved away. We got a lot of boarded up buildings.

Q. You say it was an integrated community?

A. A lot of whites, primarily Jewish, if I'm not mistaken. I can remember coming

out here as a youngster in the 40's when this was primarily a Jewish neighborhood. So primarily it was Jewish and some Irish Catholics also. I don't know about Italians. Most of the Italians reside on the north side of Market Street in a little pocket right off of 63rd Street.

Q. You say in '59 and '60 it was a fairly well mixed community?

A. More white than black.

Q. Who owned the stores here on 60th Street?

A. Jewish merchants. And now the Jewish merchants have left. Most of these same businesses are being occupied by Orientals. And to that I say this. If we are going to live in this community we should be a part of this business community. And effective this summer I will have two businesses going. I feel very, very strongly that we as black people should get involved in the businesses in this community where by we can keep the money going around in the community. Other ethnic groups do this.

Q. Why do you think the Jewish and Irish Catholics and other groups move out? Why was there a change in the 60's?

A. My personal belief is that it was just myths. I have encountered many myths. My first myth came in the service. The myth that black people will do this and black people will do that. They have been told this from the day of their birth, from birth to death and consequently they believe it. And I think it is the same thing that happened to these people.

Q. In addition to the changes of types of businesses here on this block on 60th Street and whose owning and running the businesses, what other changes have you seen over the 20 years?

A. The goods and services from the city have deteriorated to nothing. The last administration just gave us nothing. Trash, no garbage collection, nothing. Community development funds, none of that came to exist in this community. That money was taken from this community and shifted to other areas and other people did other things with it. So the goods and services stopped and as you know, when goods and services are cut off from a community it is the life blood of the community. And until we as a community get together as a block and start voting and tell our politicians that we have clout, make our politicians more accountable to us, then I think that the goods and services are going to stay the way they are.

THEODORE WELSH
Age 75

Q. Where and when were you born?

A. **In the City of Philadelphia on October 3, 1905.**

Q. What streets did you live on in Philadelphia?

A. **I was born on Bouvier Street in South Philadelphia and later moved to 20th and Naudain Street in South Philly and later to 3632 Filbert, then to 4949 Brown Street where I married.**

Q. What are your earliest memories of the streets and neighborhoods that you lived in when you were very young?

A. **Those memories. I had a lot of friends. Everyone was very nice to me. I didn't have any trouble of any kind. I was a good mixer. I was the youngest child. I didn't have my brothers around to protect me, so I was on my own.**

Q. What schools did you attend?

A. **I went to Durham School, 16th and Lombard; then I attended the Kendrick School, 38th and Powelton Avenue, then the Newton School at 36th and Chestnut. That land is now part of Penn's campus.**

Q. Were they all black?

A. **No, just the opposite then. We were in the minority. Very lovely schools, very dedicated teachers.**

Q. What were some of your earliest memories about these schools?

A. **Earliest memories . . . they used to have exercises, you know, and races. I was the coordinator of the races at the eighth grade level of the Penn relays for the Newton School.**

Q. What was school like for you?

A. **Very pleasant. I didn't have any trouble with homework. I didn't do homework but I always got by all right and made passing grades. I wasn't number one or anything like that.**

Q. As you were growing up, what did you do on Saturdays?

A. **I always worked on Saturdays. My father had a barber shop at the corner of 20th and Naudain and I had to go to the barber shop and clean the shop and do the marketing. You see, my**

mother lived in West Philadelphia and he worked in South Philadelphia. So every Saturday I had to go down, stop off and buy the groceries and bring them back to West Philly.

Q. Where did you shop in South Philadelphia?

A. At the Acme Market right on the corner near where my father's barber shop was.

Q. How much did you make when you worked for your father?

A. There was no salary involved. It was just a matter of bed and board.

Q. Did you belong to any boys clubs, YMCA, or any neighborhood clubs?

A. They were very scarce at that time. There were very few of them around. I can't imagine a YMCA at that time. During World War I, I belonged to . . . what do they call them, not the Boy Scouts . . . oh, the Cadet Corps.

Q. Tell me about the activities you were involved in when you were in the Cadet Corps.

A. It was during World War I and we used to drill and go on hikes. We'd go out in the bushes there and the mosquitoes would eat us up. We used to buy from the surplus store various items of uniforms, knapsacks and things like that.

Q. Did you have a job after school?

A. No. No. The only job I had was working with my father. At high school age he invited me down to learn the barber business. That was in 1922. So from 1922 until now I've been in the barber business.

Q. How did you spend your summer vacations?

A. Oh . . . on Sundays we would go to Atlantic City and things like that. Then I had a brother who lived upstate and I used to go and see him on Sundays. Generally during the week I was around home and around the barber shop.

Q. As you grew up were you active in church?

A. I had to go to church. Oh, yes . . . I wasn't active. I was just there.

Q. What memories do you have about church life?

A. The only memories I have is the "old man" would give me a nickel and I would put it in my pocket and try to keep it. And, in church I used to distribute the hymn books.

Q. What did you and your friends do for recreation?

A. We used to play in the streets. I was never active athletically so I'd go to different houses and sometimes we'd go to Fenway Park because I was in walking distance of 36th and Filbert and we'd go to look over the river, and so forth.

Q. When you were young, was your block interracial?

A. No, mostly black. Very few whites lived in that immediate vicinity. I had several white friends at that time, too. They were very nice.

Q. Who were some of the people in your life that influenced you beside your parents?

A. That's too far back.

Q. You can't remember?

A. You are going back 50 years now, 60 years. Oh, yes, I did have some friends. I can't remember their names. They were very nice. Of course, they are long dead now. There were several neighbors. I used to go and talk to them. You, know, like we would go from house to house and talk to them. And one was named Waters and one was in the army and he came back. That's all I remember about that.

Q. Did you go to the movies often?

A. Oh, yes. The movies were only five cents then. I used to go up to Tuxedo Theatre at Haverford and Lancaster Avenue and see the serials and so forth.

Q. What movies did you see?

A. Westerns.

Q. Where did you go to Junior High School?

A. There was no Junior High School at that time. There was no Middle School at that time. You went from 8th grade to West Philadelphia High School.

Q. What problems did you and your friends face growing up in Philadelphia?

A. We had very few problems. There were several groups with whom I didn't associate - roughnecks you know. Of course, I would smile at them very nicely and get out of their way. Among my immediate friends were the people at church.

Q. Do you have any memories about Philadelphia in the 40's?

A. Well, first thing, in Philadelphia in the 40's there was no fear. Everybody felt secure. Of course, at that time - let's see, in the 40's. Prior to the 40's there used to be what they called the Berg gang of white kids down around 33rd Street. You see I lived at 36th. I used to walk down to the barber shop. I remember one day a guy asked me for a match and cigarette. On the Walnut Street Bridge, he hit me in the jaw, so later I used the Market Street Bridge. That's all I remember about that time. But the time you are talking about, I felt secure. I had my own little group of friends and we stayed together. Their mothers knew my mother. So we generally palled around together and sayed together, for protection I imagine. I don't know why.

Q. What were the big events for children and youth in the city when you were growing up?

A. New Year's Parade, the movies, Halloween and the holidays. Christmas you'd get to go around and get the presents, you know. We used to get Halloween masks on and go up and parade on Lancaster Avenue at that time. At 40th and Lancaster Avenue was the center of the parade in West Philadelphia, and then they used to go on down to South Philadelphia for the Mummer's Day Parade.

Q. What changes have you seen over the years in Philadelphia?

A. Wow, the change. So many changes. Of course, as we know now, there have been so many advances. People go out and get good jobs, have good jobs. And those that don't want to be helped, can't be helped. Remember there were two wars. World War I, that was entirely different than World War II. World War II was only, let's see . . . when World War I ended I was 12 years old and in the 6th grade. We ran out that day. Oh, incidentally, I passed through the flu epidemic, too. That fall of 1918 the schools closed for six months. And, I remember the day that World War I ended. They let us out of school. I walked up the street and my sister was so happy because we had two brothers . . . one in the army and one in the navy. So far they were safe. World War II, I was older and I could recognize more. I personally registered for the draft. I was very fortunate that I didn't register in West Philadelphia. Friends of mine where I live now on Wyalusing Avenue - all of them went in the army. Someone said in West Philly, don't register. Go down to South Philadelphia. In South Philadelphia there were more people down there—black people. Out here in West Philly they hadn't become entirely black at that time. In South Philadelphia they had plenty of black people to take my place in the army.

Q. You mentioned that West Philadelphia was mostly white. When did it change to have black people moving in?

A. In World War II that happened. As people came from the South, they had to go somewhere. World War II . . . that's when the great influx of strangers came to Philadlephia. When they came to Philadelphia, downtown was fairly crowded so they begun to branch out to various parts of the city. They had jobs, they earned money so they could buy houses and so forth.

Q. When you say strangers, do you mean people moving from the South?

A. Yes, I saw two exoduses from the South. I saw the original one in 1918; I saw quite a few of them. I remember we had a lady rooming in our house and she had never seen snow. I said, "Mrs. Stone, it's snowing outside." And she said, "Oh, let me see it." And she ran out like a little child picking up the snow. She had never seen snow before. Then in 1943, I think they were more sophisticated. There was a big difference because conditions in the South had changed too. At that time they had what you call transportation companies. They had men that went from the north down south and recruited people from the farms to work in the industrial north. They did it during both World Wars.

Q. What advice would you give teenagers growing up in Philadelphia today?

A. Stay in school as long as he could . . . learn all you can and try to stay in school. If you stay in school and finish school, you will make a more reliable employee. Now, if you are the type of person who drops out of school, they will say that you aren't reliable. So, I say, get all the education you can. And pray that you would have good parents that would encourage you and motivate you to do that.

Q. Okay, Mr. Welsh, you did mention that you went to West Philadelphia High School, which is now all black. Could you tell me something about West Philadelphia High and your memories of that.

A. My impression of the class was that there were only about five blacks in there. It was like other schools at that time. Everybody got along. There was no racial problem as far as I could ever see. No gang fights or anything like that.

Q. What problems did you have as blacks during the depression?

A. You see, I had fewer problems than most people because being in business, I didn't have to seek a job. I already had a job made to order. The only bad thing . . . I didn't make any money. No money around. Nobody had any money. I remember in 1933, the day the banks closed . . . I did three dollars worth of business all day Saturday. I was generally making about ten dollars a day at that time. That's the day the banks were closed. So the problems that most colored people had to face . . . we didn't have to go on relief or anyting because we had the business and we got by being good managers and managing the money properly. Haircuts only cost twenty-five cents. I saw "soup lines" and women standing on corners trying to get day work and I saw once prosperous customers wearing run-down shoes and clothing. We moved our shop to South Street in 1934 to get a cheaper rent. My father moved out from the home we were buying to one we bought for the unpaid mortage of $1,000. We didn't have to go on relief on account of being in business. We made it!

Q. What changes did you have to go through in the 60's during the time of Martin Luther King?

A. It didn't affect me at all at that time. I was just an innocent observer. I watched what happened and tried to see if he was doing the right thing. I didn't see too many results at that time of what he was doing. Letting Bull Conner beat your head didn't make much sense to me. The March on Washington elated me but three days later those three little girls burned in the bombing of an Alabama church left me cold. Reading about changes in the South now I see that King's program was effective.

Economic changes have been for the better and have greatly improved for most Americans. We have gotten some of it. Some of the least fortunate have been able to take advantage of better conditions, but I think the minimum wage affects black people adversely because of the lack of education and job experience in many cases are not worth the price the employer must pay.

RALEIGH H. MERRITT
Age 83

Q. What is your full name?

A. Raleigh H. Merritt. I am a Registered Real Estate Broker, with offices at 5440 Market Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, since April 30, 1930. I understand that you are a student at Sayre Junior High, 59th and Walnut Streets; is that true? God bless you. I wish you much success. Any questions you want to ask, I'll be glad to cooperate with you.

Q. Where were you born?

A. I was born in November, 1896, in Seville, Georgia, a small village about 12 miles east of Cordele, Georgia. I was told that there were at that time about 4 stores, a turpentine firm and one sawmill located in Seville, dating from about 1885 until around 1912. Also it was largely a farming area.

I would like to refer you to a profile about me in the December 1979 issue of Drexel University News; it will tell you how my father, James Merritt, along with his father Melvin Merritt, left their old homestead out from Wilmington, North Carolina, after my father's mother passed, for Seville, Georgia, about 1887. They took a number of workmen and their families to Seville.

In April 1899, my father, James Merritt, along with my uncle made a trip to Lumberton, Mississippi then a thriving area of much timber, sawmills, and turpentine firms. Thousands of acres of fertile land and timber were being offered by the Federal Government for homesteading in South Mississippi.

My father made a business deal with the John Erwin and Young's Turpentine Co., to erect 7 four room frame houses on 1/4 acre each. The neatly framed homes were completely finished within five months, and they were all occupied by my family and the other six families who my father brought from Seville, Georgia. I believe we arrived in the Mississippi village some time in November 1899.

Q. What was life like for you growing up in Mississippi?

A. When I came along, the youngsters did not have the conveniences and the opportunities, especially if you were black, as the young people have today. For the most part, however, they had great respect for their parents, the teachers and showed a general sense of politeness for the older people. It was a common thing to see students standing on a corner or in the school building corridor standing at attention and saluting a passing teacher; this is a trait which is worthy to be cultivated today by everyone. The proper attitude and consideration for the rights of other people is very important.

Q. What were your earliest memories about the neighborhood that you lived in?

A. I have much to remember from my early boyhood days. Even though I worked hard I played much of the time, riding horses in a race, fishing and swimming in the clear and fresh waters of Red Creek. Red Creek bordered our land on the North and Southwestern portion, being one of the larger medium streams in Southeast Mississippi. It emptied into the gulf some sixty miles from where we lived. During the early spring the waters were too deep and swift to swim in, but there was much fun and excitement to watch the men flowing logs and timber down stream. These log jams were floated for several miles before being drifted into a large pond, used solely by the Bond Sawmill Lumber Company, one of the largest, if not the largest sawmills in Southeast Mississippi at that time; Bond is about 30 odd miles northeast from Gulfport, Mississippi.

The log floating season would last usually from February, at high water time, through April, and it was financially profitable for us because much of the timber belonged to my father, and part of the force were men who worked for him throughout the year.

Among the many daring things I did as a youngster, there is one incident I could never forget. I was ten years old and this was in June when the water was relatively shallow in places. I rode a horse across Red Creek, where the water must have been at least 12 to 15 feet deep, and this was a rather narrow plain stretch of the river being about 200 feet wide. The water was crystal clear and running slowly. My horse was a good swimmer and with me on his back without a saddle, he swam across the river, without an incident, in a matter of minutes by merely keeping his head above the water.

I remember clearly when I was eight years old, riding in a wagon along with my mother and my two older sisters, 14 and 11 years old respectively. Late one afternoon, on our way home, at about one and one-half miles from the house, a very large black bear emerged from a swamp. That bear ran after us as fast as it could, trying to overtake us so that it may tear us apart. My mother and older sister rushed the buggy horse to its fullest speed, and the horse out ran the bear. Meanwhile we were screaming as loudly as possible. My father and several of his men heard us and they met us on their horses, and one of the men shot and killed the bear instantly.

A few days later while riding a horse along this same road from where the bear had chased us, I saw a very large snake. I rushed home and told my father about it, and he went back with me. The snake was still there. It opened its mouth, and that was indeed something to shock anyone, because its mouth looked large enough to swallow a 4 ounce cup. My father shot the snake in the mouth with one single rifle bullet, and that ended it. During the next day, people came near and far to see that 18 feet long rattlesnake my father killed on the spot.

Q. What problems did you and your friends face growing up?

A. I grew up in the South. You want to know what problems I faced? There were problems. I walked into a big store in town, as I remember the largest store in town called the Red Store. I saw this beautiful pair of pants. I was about fourteen years old. I thought I had to have that pair of pants - long pants. You know, then, boys didn't wear long pants 'till they were

fourteen or fifteen. It indicated manhood. The problem was how to get those pants. How to get the money to buy those pants, a suit or that shirt . . . that was a major problem. The only way to get what you wanted was to work for it.

Q. Did you belong to any neighborhood gangs or groups?

A. No. I didn't know what that was at the time.

Q. What were the big events for children and youth when you were growing up?

A. Big events? Santa Claus and Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus.

Q. What schools did you attend and what are your memories?

A. I attended the neighborhood school and the Lumberton High School, and then Tuskegee Institute. I left my father's 500 acre farm in Lumberton, Mississippi to study agriculture at the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute for the training of colored young men and women in Alabama. After I graduated from Tuskegee I came to Philadelphia to find work and to study at Drexel. This is where I studied real estate, insurance, and law and graduated from Drexel Evening College in 1928.

Q. Who were some of the people who influenced you during your life besides your parents?

A. Several persons influenced me to be somebody. At Tuskegee, Dr. George Washington Carver, Booker T. Washington, the school's principal and founder, and his wife Mrs. Booker T. Washington. Tuskegee became a second home to me and I had a special friendship with Dr. Carver. He would take time to listen to you and I met Mrs. Washington on my second day there and I became one of her "favorite boys" and she invited me to attend Dr. Carver's Bible classes. When I decided to study for a business career Dr. Carver gave me encouragement.

Q. Why did you come to Philadelphia?

A. Well, to find work and to continue my education. A friend told me that there were jobs here. At first I worked as a waiter in Gladwyne. I started the Temple University Business program at first but the classes didn't fit my work schedule so I transferred to Drexel and worked during the day at the Old Citizens and Southern Bank and Trust Company at 19th and South Streets.

Q. When did you get your business started?

A. In 1932 I began buying old houses and restoring them and was one of the few black realtors in Philadelphia but I couldn't buy large pieces of land in the city. Many people wouldn't sell to blacks. I was once threatened with shotguns when I tried to buy some land.

Q. What community activities have you been involved in?

A. In 1932 I co-founded the Vine Memorial Baptist Church on 56th Street and Girard and in 1934 I founded the Carver Art and Science Association and we sponsored art exhibits and lectures. In 1939, I was the president of the Philadelphia Negro Chamber of Commerce.

Q. What changes have you seen in Philadelphia over the years?

A. All sorts of things, constant change. If there is one permanent thing, it is constant change. You see more abandoned houses and boarded up houses than you did a few years ago. That's just one of the changes.

Q. Do you have any advice for teenagers growing up and living in Philadelphia today?

A. Advice? Yes, I do. First, as I indicated a few minutes ago, have respect, especially for your teachers, neighbors, respect for yourself.

EUSTACE GAY, SR.
Age 88

Q. Where and when were you born?

A. **Barbados, British West Indies, in 1892, on May 2nd.**

Q. And where did you grow up?

A. **I grew up there . . . I went through grammar and high school there.**

Q. Where did you move to when you left Barbados?

A. **I went to New York.**

Q. Do you remember when you first came to Philadelphia?

A. **Yes, in a sense. My mother stayed here many years ago, before she was married and naturally I was looking for many things that she spoke about.**

Q. What did you do when you first came to Philadelphia?

A. **I did anything that I could find. I worked as an elevator boy in one or two big hotels and that kind of thing, for the most part, until finally somebody saw me some where writing shorthand. I couldn't type too well but you couldn't talk too fast for me.**

Q. Where did you learn shorthand?

A. **I learned shorthand in Barbados.**

Q. After you worked as an elevator operator what did you do? What other jobs did you have?

A. **I had a job in a hotel as bus boy and that sort of thing. I got tips and so forth. And I did that regularly before I came to the *Tribune.***

Q. So did you use shorthand at the *Tribune?*

A. **Oh, yes. I got to the *Tribune* because of E. Washington Rhodes. I worked with him first on some non-*Tribune* work.**

Q. What kind of things did you do at the *Tribune?*

A. **I wrote articles and made transcripts of people's speeches.**

Q. Who are some of the famous people whose speeches you worked on?

A. That's hard to say because, I'll be perfectly frank, I'm not being boastful, they didn't allow me to remain on that kind of thing. They sent others out and they had me getting ready for the overall work on the *Tribune*.

Q. So you ran the overall operation?

A. Yes. And that was especially true after Rhodes became a lawyer. But he still retained the *Tribune* work but not to the extent that he had been because he couldn't do it. I was favored.

Q. How many years did you work for the *Tribune* altogether?

A. I have been there almost 40 years now.

Q. What did you like about newspaper work?

A. When I came to the *Tribune* I had had newspaper experience in the West Indies. So the *Tribune's* experiences were nothing new. I wrote shorthand well but it was very difficult at times to follow the speaker. I could type but it was too slow. In shorthand I was very good . . . 150 words a minute . . . is a splendid achievement.

Q. When you came to Philly did you know anybody in this city?

A. Oh, yes. That's how I came to the city . . . I've never been able to become a first class typist, but people knew of my prowess as far as shorthand is concerned. I met Rhodes when he was a figure in a national court and I was taking down the news.

Q. You were a court stenographer?

A. Oh, yes. I did practically everything. I don't want to be a braggadoscio but I could do practically anything as far as taking notes.

Q. When you came to Philadelphia where did you live?

A. Well, I came with some friends who had a room that I could rent. That was in North Philadelphia.

Q. Who were the people that were the most helpful to you when you came here as a young man?

A. Well, I think–I can't think for the minute of names . . . but the general help of persons who knew me at home . . . who knew my parents . . . who knew that I was a very good shorthand writer and they were telling people about it. So I went to the *Tribune* maybe 30 years ago, because of the fact that some meeting where Mr. Rhodes was I took some very fine shorthand notes and from that time I was there. Plus the fact that I had worked for a newspaper in Barbados, the *Barbados Advocate* . . . not in the office but on the outside in the streets and so forth. But I knew what they did to get news.

Q. What excited you about working at the *Tribune?*

A. **Well, first of all, previous experience at where I was born, plus the fact that it was going to make use of something that I really knew and that was shorthand.**

Q. You were about 20 or so when you came to Philadelphia?

A. **I was a little more than 20, maybe 21 or something like that. I've been here about 50 years.**

Q. When you first came to Philadelphia what kind of jobs could black people get?

A. **Well, I would say, as far as I am personally concerned people with my, and this is said without any pride in my educational level . . . people in my educational level didn't have the difficulty when they began to hire colored people because they knew something that the white employer needed. Now, I could write shorthand . . . couldn't use a typewriter very well, but what I wrote on the typewriter was grammatically correct.**

Q. What kind of stories did you cover?

A. **I covered general things. I never went into court as much as my successor did.**

Q. Do you remember The Depression years?

A. **Yes, I remember them in a general way. They didn't affect me in the way they would have affected someone who wasn't working at all. I must have been married by that time and I never had more than two children at any one time.**

Q. How many days a week did you work at the *Tribune?*

A. **Every day of the week.**

Q. Seven days a week?

A. **Well, no, I didn't work much on Saturdays unless something very special was going to take place on Saturday . . . it is a matter of working for the newspaper. It was published daily by the way . . . you couldn't afford to miss something because it happened on Saturday.**

Q. In addition to your work at the *Tribune* what other groups and organizations did you belong to?

A. **Well, to tell you the truth, I made the knowledge of more people because of my church activities.**

Q. What church?

A. **Zion Baptist where Rev. Leon Sullivan is the minister.**

Q. How long have you been a member?

A. I've been a member since the year 1913, or something like that.

Q. What was your title at the *Tribune* when you left?

A. Chairman, Emeritus.

Q. And your title when you first went there?

A. A reporter. In addition to being a very good shorthand writer I could still write grammatically which was an important thing—spell words and so forth. So Mr. Rhodes, who was a lawyer, I went to work for before he became in ascendency of the *Tribune*—his father-in-law owned it. So when he went in ownership and wanted somebody with shorthand, I worked for him until he was appointed to a big state job.

Q. What would you like young students to know about the *Tribune?*

A. I would imagine the young student, if he is interested in getting along, ought to know something about the importance of the Negro newspaper properly run in any community in which he lives . . . and the *Tribune* I would say without any grandiose talk, the *Tribune* was and is still the leading Negro newspaper in the city. We had a number that started and stopped.

Q. What are some of the other Negro newspapers that were operating in your time?

A. The *Pittsburgh Courier* finally came into Philadelphia because they were trying to improve the sale of the paper. But the *Pittsburgh Courier* was a Pittsburgh problem actually. But when the *Tribune* finally got to the place where it was the newspaper, why those papers which came in didn't have the run they had in previous years. The *Afro-American* had very little circulation at this moment in Philadelphia. And they couldn't, and you can see a reason for this, if you are on the job, doing a good job and somebody comes in . . . unless he is tremendously expert and spends a lot of money, he can't hurt you if you're doing what's right in the newspaper world. Plus, you have the fact of advertising. Another paper can't get the advertising in the city that the paper that's there 365 days a year can get. And so Mr. Rhodes, at that time, brought in the people that knew how to talk to would-be advertisers and that kind of thing.

Q. Did you have your own column in the paper at any time?

A. Yes, in my own time.

Q. What was your column about?

A. I don't know as it was really a column. It was one of these things, you write one every week. I forget what it was but it attracted quite a lot of attention. I can't do it anymore. In fact I wasn't allowed to do it anymore after I became editor because an editor can't make certain statements. So other young fellows have taken it over. But it was intended to be a comment on

the things that were going on without any real cow-towing to people who were running it. You had to be careful what you said because you didn't want any libel.

Q. What advice do you have to young black students who want to be journalists.

A. It all depends. You see, when I came along I had done newspaper work in the West Indies and used shorthand as a means of being able to write fully what people said. So I had an advantage over a young man just coming out of college who had a lot more than I had in any degree. But you still had to learn how to get a story, what to get and how to put it together so that it was publishable. That required experience, an experience, by the way, which I had in my native land where I worked for years as a reporter.

Q. Mr. Gay, what have been the high points of your life in Philadelphia? What are your best memories of your life here?

A. Well, I'm afraid I haven't really thought of it, but I believe my success at the *Tribune* opened the door for me in one of the leading churches in the city. And that is the church of which Rev. Leon Sullivan is now the pastor. I became associated with that church. I took tremendous interest in the Sunday School work. I felt that getting young people ready for life was important. I just gave up being Sunday School Superintendent after 60 years.

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Recovering the Afro-American Historic Heritage of Philadelphia

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